

Practices of Looking

An Introduction to Visual Culture

Second Edition



Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright

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Postmodernism, Indie Media, and Popular Culture

Jia Zhang-ke's 2004 film *The World (Shijie)* takes place in a vast amusement park, called World Park, outside of Beijing. Since 1993 about one and a half million people have visited this park each year to experience "the world" through small-scale replicas of iconic buildings and structures that are major tourist destinations throughout the world: a replica of lower Manhattan (with the Twin Towers still standing), the leaning Tower of Pisa (where, as in Italy, people pose for pictures as if they are holding up the tower), the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Egyptian Pyramids, the Tower of London, and a replica of China's own Red Square. These sites can be visited on a "global voyage" taken by foot, speedboat, or battery-operated car. There are several World Parks in China, each a site where Chinese citizens, whose ability to travel outside China is still restricted by the government, are invited to "visit" the world through these replicas. "See the world without ever leaving Beijing!" the park slogan announces. The film focuses on the employees at the park, young Chinese and immigrant workers from Russia, who dress in costumes to perform spectacles of different world cultures—Bollywood-type dances in Indian costumes, flight attendant costumes for the simulated airplane trip that never leaves the ground, and so on. When these young workers communicate with each other via text messaging on their cell phones, the film reverts to animated sequences in which the characters imagine themselves flying through various park landscapes and out of the park.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard suggests that, with the rise of media technologies for making models of the real, the relationship between the model (the map) and the real social territory it charts



FIG. 8.1
Stills from *The World (Shijie)*,
2004

changed in the postwar years of the twentieth century. As we entered into a *postmodern* era characterized by media and technologies of simulation, we lost sight of “the real.” Our confidence in referents declined as we came to see the simulation as taking the place of the real. He wrote: “In the hyperreality of pure simulacra, then, there is no more imitation, duplication, or parody. The simulator’s model offers us ‘all the signs of the real’ without its ‘vicissitudes.’”¹

Beijing’s World Park is a postmodern simulation in Baudrillard’s terms. It is a place where the experience of visiting “real” places is presented as a substitute for actually visiting them. With its small-scale pyramids and miniature Eiffel Tower, World Park is not unlike the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, where visitors can “experience” Venice by riding in gondolas on artificial canals, or the Paris Las Vegas Hotel which has, like World Park, a replica of the Eiffel Tower. It is also not unlike Main Street U.S.A. at Disneyland in California, where visitors can experience small-town America and which was one of the examples used by early theorists of postmodernism, most notably Baudrillard, to talk about simulation as a key factor in the postmodern condition. Another similar site is the planned theme park in Dubai, Dubailand, which will include in its Falcon City of Wonders *life-size* replicas of famous world monuments. Yet the World Park, both in actuality and as portrayed in Zhang-ke’s film, introduces several important new elements into the question of the postmodern. As the site in the world in which global capitalism’s territorial expansion is perhaps at its most explosive, China has embodied the contradictions of being a postindustrial, globalizing postmodern culture that is also undergoing expanded modernization and industrialization. As Jia Zhang-ke, the director of the film, states,

“those artificial landscapes are very significant. The landscape in the World Park includes famous sights from all over the world. They’re not real, but they can satisfy people’s longing for the world. They reflect the very strong curiosity of people in this country, and the interest they have in becoming a part of international culture. At the same time, this is a very strange way to fulfill those demands. To me, it makes for a very sorrowful place.”² Indeed, the film ends with a scene in which workers in a gritty, industrialized neighborhood close to and in contrast to the glittery World Park, dark, anonymous figures, are asphyxiated by the fumes from trying to heat their meager quarters, a reminder of the degree to which most of the world’s populations live not in the world of simulations, virtual communication technologies (like the animated sequences of text-messaged fantasies in the film), or postindustrial work but in rural and urban poverty.

We begin with this example to make clear a fundamental aspect of postmodern society, identity, and style: we do not live in a postmodern world. Rather, we live in a world in which aspects of postmodernity are in constant tension with aspects of modernity and premodern existence, a world that is both preindustrial and postindustrial, in which many of the qualities that characterized modernity (the speeding up of time and compression of space that resulted in part from urbanization, industrialization, and automation) have become conditions in postmodernity alongside and in relation to virtual technologies and the flows of capital, information, and media in the era of globalization. Many of the paradigmatic aspects of modernity, including the period’s emphasis on science, technology, and progress, remain quite dominant in postmodern societies. At the same time, structures of feeling, to use Raymond Williams’s term, took shape in the late twentieth century that can be characterized as late modern or postmodern. These include the ease with which we interact in simulated environments; the jaded sense that everything has been done before; a preoccupation with remakes, remixes, appropriations, and pastiche; and regard of the body as a form that is physically malleable, adaptable to models we have in mind through bodybuilding, surgeries, and drug therapies.

Baudrillard described the late twentieth century as a period during which images became more real than the real, creating a kind of hyperreality in which simulation replaced reproduction and representation. Images fascinate us, he explained, “not because they are sites of the production of meaning and representation,” but “because they are sites of the *disappearance* of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgment of reality.”³ According to Baudrillard, Western culture was epitomized, in the late twentieth century, by the dull flickering of computer and television screens. America has become paradigmatic of global looking practices ruled by the simulacra of virtual media images. Unlike representations, which make reference to a real, simulacra stand on their own without requiring recourse to real objects or worlds elsewhere. Baudrillard introduced the concept of simulation to describe the collapse between counterfeit and real, and the original and the copy, that exists in a culture that had become strongly organized

Baudrillard

around digital technologies. Baudrillard's ideas were extremely influential, in particular in the 1980s, in presenting new paradigms for thinking about what might distinguish the experience of postmodernity from modernity. His concepts give us an immediate and dramatic sense of the role of the image both as it has been transformed through digital technologies and as the dominant paradigm for contemporary identity, though not through the concept of representation per se. It is the image as simulation that epitomizes postmodernity.

In this chapter, we address the concepts of postmodernity, postmodern society, and postmodern style and how they intersect with and work in tension with modernity and modernism. The philosophical engagement with the concept of postmodernism, which began in the 1980s, was both an attempt to understand changing concepts of the human subject and an analysis of the effects of globalization, postindustrialization, computerization, and communication technologies on concepts of the self and on worldviews in late modernity. As postmodern theory has matured, the concept of simulation, a paradigm of the postmodern which epitomized its origins, is seen in the more current context of digital technologies, genetics, network theory, rhizomes, pastiche and remake culture, independent media, and new kinds of economic and spatial relationships that have resulted from globalization and trade liberalization. This does not mean that forms of simulation are not still important symptoms of the postmodern worldview—the enormous popularity of such online worlds as Second Life testify to the ease with which people move between interactions in simulated worlds and identity construction in real life. Yet, although early invocations of Baudrillard and simulation were used to proclaim the end of the real and the dominance of the image, such pronouncements seemed glib and privileged in a world that is still dominated by real poverty, manual labor, and violent conflict. The phenomenological experience of living in a fleshly body that can be injured, can feel pain, and can become ill and die is something that simulation cannot supersede or replace with virtual experience. The film theorist Vivian Sobchack makes a scathing critique of Baudrillard's theory of simulation on the grounds that in celebrating the technologically augmented and simulated body he fails to acknowledge the vulnerability of the lived body.⁴ Contemporary engagements with postmodernism, we argue, are most useful when they engage with the contradictions of these coexisting tensions.

To return to the film *The World*, the world as created through simulation is, of course, always the product of someone's labor. In the film, the low-paid workers who come from poor rural areas or who are brought in from other countries, such as indentured laborers from Russia, keep the simulation afloat. The World coexists with a world of industrial pollution, poverty, and human relationships that makes up the lives of these workers and the people who visit. In reflecting on the postmodern aspects of contemporary societies and our ease with interacting in and experiencing things within simulated environments, we are also tapping into issues of space, global culture, fantasy, and communication technologies, many of which are about concrete

material effects. In this chapter, we consider how the underlying meanings of postmodernism translate into postmodern styles in art, popular media, and advertising. These styles offer new forms of address to postmodern subjects and viewers who remain situated within a world of late modernity—a world in which the needs and conditions of everyday embodied experience remain basic to life, even as we come to view life itself on the level of the molecular and the genetic and even as we come to experience the pharmaceutical and surgical enhancement of the body as a natural aspect of everyday life.

Postmodernism and its Visual Cultures

It is difficult to identify a precise origin of postmodernism, though many critics associate it with the time after 1968. Opinions differ as to whether postmodernism is a period, a set of styles, or a broader set of politics and ideologies. Some theorists have used the term *postmodern* to describe the postwar “cultural logic of late capitalism,” a phrase famously used by cultural critic Fredric Jameson as the subtitle of his enormously influential 1991 book on postmodernism.⁵ This definition of postmodernism emphasizes the formative role of economic and political conditions, including postwar globalization, the emergence of new information technologies, new flexible forms of production, and the breakdown of the traditional nation-state, in the emergence of postmodern modes of cultural production. Others begin with the cultural objects themselves, identifying postmodernism as a set of styles—indeed, as a creative explosion of style and surface image in reaction to the rigid attention to form and underlying structure in modernism. The latter approach has been criticized for implying that postmodernism is simply a style that an artist or producer might choose to embrace or reject rather than a cultural trend that is integral to changes in culture, the economy, and politics.

Postmodernism has been characterized as a response to the conditions of late modernity linked to the late stages of capitalism. Thus postmodernity refers not just to a style and a form of subjectivity that emerged in late modernity. It also refers to changes in the social and economic conditions that help to produce these styles and ways of being a subject. We have noted that modernity refers to a period of history characterized by industrialization, an emphasis on the value of science as a means of achieving progress, and an ethos of progress and freedom associated with Enlightenment philosophy and political theory. Postmodernity is tied to shifts that include the demise of the nation-state and the dissolution of national sovereignty; the skeptical embrace of science and technology in the wake of the Holocaust and the nuclear bombing of Japan, which showed how scientific ideas could be turned against humankind and toward acts of unthinkable violence and destruction; and the promotion of trade liberalization in a world increasingly characterized by uneven global flows of money, goods, and people. Not only the rise of a world economy but also advances in technologies of travel, information,

and health care contribute to a postmodern world characterized by mobility, changeability, and flow rather than by universals of truth and unity. Thinkers such as David Harvey have characterized postmodernism as an economic, post-Fordist culture of flexible accumulation and argued that we are experiencing a "phase of time-space compression that has a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life."⁶ Harvey's work has been influential in framing the "postmodern condition" within material and economic conditions, such as the deployment of new organizational forms and new technologies of production, the speeding up of production and distribution, outsourcing of labor, new technologies of control and management for production and labor, and accelerated turnover of production and consumption. All of this has had the effect of speeding up culture and the circulation of goods, and changing the meanings attached to goods to reflect the accelerated, digital life we lead in late capitalism.

It is widely agreed that there is no precise moment of rupture between the modern and the postmodern. Rather, as we have noted, postmodernism intersects with and permeates late modernity, a period during which Enlightenment notions of liberalism, modernization, and progress continue to compel development in many of the poorer and less developed nations and economies and during which modernist approaches based on scientific truth and technological advancement continue to be invoked. The 2000s have been characterized as a decade of neoliberalism, meaning that classical liberalism was revived to rationalize the use of economic and trade liberalization as a means of promoting economic growth and democratic freedom. Neoliberalism finds its precedent in the Enlightenment model of liberalism, a doctrine of individual freedom that included such measures as limited government and the protection of personal property rights and civil liberties. The proliferation of images and image-producing apparatuses such as the cinema and video and the digital imaging devices that can be characterized as postmodern have been met by criticism steeped in modernist ways of thinking about the real and the true. Although we can say that postmodernism describes a set of conditions and practices occurring in late modernity, modernism and postmodernism are not concepts that are strictly period-specific or successive. Aspects of postmodernism can be seen in the early twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century; aspects of modernity and postmodernism, as well as modern and postmodern styles, coexist both in unison and in tension.

There are, however, social aspects of postmodernity that can be distinguished from those of modernity. Modern thought was characterized by a sense of knowing that was forward looking and positive and the belief that one could know what was objectively true and real by discerning the structural relations that underpin social formations and natural phenomena. The postmodern is characterized by the questioning of the supposed universality of structural knowledge, as well as a skepticism about the modern belief in the universality of progress: Do we really know that

progress is always a good thing? Can we really know the human subject? How can any experience be pure or unmediated? How do we know what truth is? Whereas modernity was based on the idea that the truth can be discovered by accessing the right channels of knowledge to arrive at structural and material bases, the postmodern is distinguished by the idea that there is not one but many truths and that the notions of truth are culturally and historically relative constructions. In their emphasis on the cultural and historical relativity of truth and meaning, mid-twentieth-century thinkers as diverse as the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead and French philosopher Michel Foucault can both be characterized as presciently postmodernist in this sense. The postmodern entails a crisis of universality and cultural authority, that is, a profound questioning of the very foundations of truth that shore up our knowledge of social structures and our means of producing knowledge about social relations and culture.

For these reasons, postmodernism is described as a questioning of master narratives (or metanarratives). A master narrative is a framework that purports to explain society, if not the world, in comprehensive terms. Religion, science, Marxism, psychoanalysis, Enlightenment myths of progress, and other theories that each set out to explain all facets of life are master theories or master narratives. Metanarratives involve a sense of an inevitable linear progress toward a particular goal—enlightenment, emancipation, self-knowledge, and so forth. French theorist Jean-François Lyotard characterized postmodern theory as profoundly skeptical of these metanarratives, their universalism, and the premise that they could explain the human condition.⁷ Hence postmodern theory has undertaken to examine philosophical concepts that were previously perceived as beyond reproach or question, such as the ideas of value, order, control, identity, centralized power, or meaning itself. It has involved a scrutinizing of social institutions, such as the media, the university, the museum, the practices of science and medicine, and the law, in order to analyze the assumptions under which they operate and the ways that power works within them in a manner more distributed and complex than previously recognized. One could say that postmodernism's central goal is to put all assumptions under scrutiny in order to reveal the values that underlie all systems of thought and thus to question the ideologies within them that are seen as natural. This means that the idea of authenticity is always in question in postmodernism.

We have noted that style is an important defining characteristic of postmodernism. The term postmodernism has been used to describe some of the styles and approaches to making images that have circulated more prominently since the late 1970s. We could argue that postmodernism defines an ethos, a set of sensibilities, or a politics of cultural experience and production in which style and image predominate. Thus, although postmodernism may not be about style alone, style is one of the chief characteristics of a postmodern ethos. The term postmodern has been used to describe fashions and even politicians who produce themselves through myriad media images and texts, generating identities as simulacra—hyperreal

identities with no recourse back to a real person, their composite media image being more real than real.

The distinctions between modern art styles and postmodern styles reveal overlapping strategies and interests. For instance, modern literature, film, and art were often engaged in a critique of the assumptions of modern thought and with the alienation of modern life. One could argue that Marcel Duchamp and his fellow Dada artists were some of the first postmodernists in the early twentieth century from the moment that Duchamp placed a urinal on a pedestal, signed it with a fake name (R. Mutt), and called it art, in the process critiquing the very foundations of the art system. We can say, however, that modernist art and theory were distinguished by elitism toward media and popular culture, whereas postmodernism has been at one with the popular from its origins. Although postmodernism is not just style and image, it relies heavily on style and image to produce its worlds. In the period associated with late (post-World War II) modernist thinking and movements, critics spoke from positions they imagined to be outside—specifically, politically or aesthetically above—popular culture in order to criticize that culture or to reveal the ideological investments hidden beneath the glitzy surface of representations and images. Postmodernism dispels the idea that surface does not contain meaning in itself or that structures lie beneath the mask of surface appearances. The modernist way of thinking about structure did not stop with the emergence of postmodernism; this approach to art, criticism, and theory continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, overlapping with tendencies associated with the postmodern.

Postmodernism thus has a very different mode of analysis from modernism of popular culture, mass culture, and the surface world of images. Whereas opposition to mass culture and its saturation of the world with images is one of the hallmarks of modernism, postmodernism emphasizes irony and a sense of one's own involvement in low or popular culture. The forms of low, mass, or commercial culture so disdained by modernists are understood, in the context of postmodernism, as the inescapable conditions in and through which we generate our critical texts. One signpost of the difference between a modern and a postmodern critical sensibility is the acknowledgement within the latter that we cannot occupy a position outside of that which we analyze; we cannot get beneath the surface to find something more real or more true. As postmodern theorist Santiago Colás puts it, "We may attempt to forget or ignore mass culture, but it will neither forget nor ignore us."⁸ Postmodernism complicates the divisions between high and low culture, elite and mass consciousness, and in doing so makes it impossible to occupy a critical viewpoint on culture from outside or above it. This also means that the postmodern condition and postmodern style define a context in which consumerism is integrated into life and identity in complex ways. Thus one of the primary aspects of postmodernism is that it entails a reflexive recognition of our lived relation within the world at the level of consumption, branding, images, media, and the popular. Appropriation, parody, pastiche, and self-conscious nostalgic play are just some of the approaches associated with

postmodernism. Thus we could say that the rise of remix culture is the result of shifting postmodern sensibilities coupled with the emergence of a set of technological practices enabled by the Web and digital technology. This means that remix and remake culture are not only evidence of new kinds of cultural and consumer practices but are also integrated into new concepts of identity and agency.

One of the criticisms of much postmodern theory has been that it can be apolitical in its jaded irony. Irony is certainly a strong characteristic of theories that spin out on style, simulation and surface or those that characterize the postmodern condition, as both Jameson and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari did in the 1980s, as a form of cultural schizophrenia in a way that ignores the degree to which schizophrenia is a mental disorder rather than a mere metaphor of the fragmentation of everyday life.⁹ The question of how postmodernism can be related to politics and whether or not postmodernism is politically regressive (while being culturally progressive) has been debated over the past few decades as a response in part to the centrality of theorists such as Baudrillard and his pronouncements of the end of the real and its representations. It is worth noting that modernism was tied to a range of political viewpoints, from apolitical avant-garde movements such as cubism to an embrace of the Soviet project to futurism's ties to fascism in Italy.

Yet many thinkers have tried to make postmodern concepts offer an opening into politics rather than bystepping it. Postmodern thought has been keenly engaged in the questioning of modern concepts of the self and identity, emphasizing fragmentation and plurality. These concerns open our thinking to include new ways of being human subjects and new ways of thinking about how identities (racial, ethnic, gendered, etc.) are in fact varied and plural sites from which to speak. David Harvey writes that one response to the space-time compression of postmodernism has been a kind of blasé been-there-done-that attitude. However, the enhanced flows of information and people in postmodernism has also led to a response in which people are imagining new ways of making community, new ways of having local and global involvement in humanitarian issues and social movements, and new ways to show respect for otherness.¹⁰ For example, with the Internet, advocacy organizations like Greenpeace have been able to build a stronger international communications base than was possible with telephones, mail, print brochures, and local meetings. Postmodern ways of organizing that build on networking, viral marketing, and recognition of consumer savviness have been successful not only for corporate advertisers, but also for activist and advocacy groups, allowing for outreach to a wider base of potential participants internationally while also fostering a stronger sense of community among members. Thus the critique of modernism and the emphasis on what modernism leaves out, which is an essential part of postmodern theory, can be seen as a means through which those voices and representations foreclosed on by modernism can be heard and visualized differently. At the same time, postmodernism signals the rise of a generalized self-consciousness and a reflexive questioning of traditional metanarratives in all facets of everyday life as a means of rethinking

the limits of previous paradigms. In doing away with master theories and master narratives, postmodernism leaves open possibilities and the means for recognizing the relative openness of the way things happen as they unfold in time. For Gilles Deleuze, *becoming* is an important term that captures the importance of moving beyond negative historical precedents in order to create something new. As theorists of the late twentieth century became boxed in by the explanatory logics of theories that could never be verified and that reproduced the same logics they critiqued, the writings of Deleuze offered a useful tool box of concepts with which to produce readings of cultural circumstances that could help us to move beyond the modernist goal of knowledge as an end in itself. Deleuze emphasized the usefulness of a rhizome's structure, in which new ideas and practices sprout up in heterogeneous, de-centered ways, much as tubers or bulbs propagate, as compared to the more centralized and orderly progression of the roots of a tree.

Addressing the Postmodern Subject

Just as the historical and cultural context of modernity created new kinds of human subjects, we can say that postmodernism and postmodern style speak to new kinds of human subjects. In interpellating these subject positions, postmodern texts participate in an exchange of signification that helps to shape how viewers engage with cultural texts, negotiate their meaning, and construct their identities in relationship to them. In looking at how postmodern style informs popular culture, art, literature, architecture, and advertising, we can see how these forms of address speak to and help to constitute (or make) new kinds of postmodern subjects.

Postmodern media texts generally speak to viewers as subjects who are in the know about codes and conventions of representation and simulation. The dominant mode of address in these texts takes the viewer to be someone who will not be fooled by techniques of propaganda and illusionism, someone who will get the reference, who is media and image savvy, as we discussed in the previous chapter about advertising. During the postmodern period, references to the real world outside the film may be as much to the world of other films or the world of a genre. Intertextuality is one means through which the referent is tied not to a reality but to another representation or simulation, as well as to a realm of consumer products tied in to the film and its cast of characters.

Let's take the case of the stylistic, cultural, economic, and global aspects of animation. Beginning in the mid-1990s, studio animated films shifted dramatically in their style. This did not happen in isolation from other genres and markets. The market for sophisticated children's programming had been growing, with Disney aiming for an adult market from the time of *Snow White* (1934) onward and with television programs such as *Sesame Street* (starting in 1969) using parody and adult-level humor geared to engage parents and children alike. Japanese animated television shows and feature films generated huge fan bases in the United States beginning with *Astro*

Boy, the animated television series of the 1960s based on a comic of the 1950s by the legendary manga artist and animator Osamu Tezuka, which was remade with success for the U.S. market in the 1980s and again in 2003. The Mighty Atom boy was for a time as popular in Japan as Mickey Mouse was in the United States. The Giant Robot (Mecha) science fiction subgenre (originating in Japan and South Korea) generated international cult attention after the release of *Mobile Suit Gundam* in 1979 and was the foundation for popular children's animation series such as *The Transformers*. The series was adapted for U.S. Saturday morning television (though still animated in Japan), along with the introduction of a Transformer toy line in 1984, the year that the Federal Communication Commission began to allow toy companies to use cartoons to promote products such as toys and lunch boxes. Transformers started out as a Japanese toy line by Takara (with the characters called Microman and Diaclone). *Transformers* (the television show and the movies) thus was part of broader intertextual market synergy that took effect through child-consumers engaging with available toy product lines off the radar of sleeping parents. It also coincided with the broad popularity of animated characters who were neither animal nor human. These cartoon worlds were composed of technologically advanced robots, "mecha" (mechanical beings), bearing little resemblance to biological life (yet who are, as the still shows, specifically gendered).

Although most of these animations were analog, not digital, productions made in the early 1980s, they featured digitized robotic beings with artificial intelligence and mechanical- and computer-augmented superhuman powers. Children identified with these collectives of fully robotic figures in a futuristic world, characters fully invested with computerized artificial life. To be robotic was, in these shows, the norm. The referent of the real biological living being in a natural world as the source of the animated figure in its world was no longer in place. Moreover, the text itself blatantly took as its referent not only the futuristic world of artificial life but also the real-life world of toys that could be bought and brought home. Children actively participated in a cycle of consumption that involved watching one's desired toys appear in animated shows and shopping "online," as it were, by using the TV screen as a site to select characters, sets, and accoutrements appearing in the world of the shows to later buy and play with at home. Baudrillard's account of the simulation engendering the real is relevant to this example of 1980s Saturday morning cartoons in which the simulation of intelligent life prefigures a world of "real" products in which the child may come to live (if the parent buys the toys). This postmodern approach to



FIG. 8.2
Still from *Transformers:
The Movie*, 1986

the screen was amplified in the experience of the Japanese-produced arcade video games that began to appear in the United States with the release of *Space Invaders* (designed by Tomohiro Nishikado and developed by Taito Corporation) in 1978 and *Pac-Man* (designed by Toru Iwatani and developed by Namco) in 1980. Video games would provide yet another textual field in which animated characters could be cross-marketed.

At the same time that child viewing practices were transformed by the aesthetics and logics of these animated computer-era action figures and toys, Japan was undergoing a transformation of its culture industry. After the devastation of World War II and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, comic books (manga) and animated films (anime) became media venues not only for children but also for adults, addressing issues such as politics, history, and culture and including genres ranging from drama, comedy, and romance to satire, pornography, and explicit violence. One of the earliest anime for adults was the 1970s *Lupin Sansei*. Based on a manga series by Monkey Punch (the pen name of mangaka Kuzuhiko Kato), this anime TV and feature film series combined adult humor and slapstick violence. Not only were there narrowcast genres of anime for groups (girls, or *Shojo*, and boys, or *Shojoen*, anime, for example); sectors of the industry produced entertainment geared to adult subgroups such as young men and older women and to taste-specific groups within adult audiences.

The release of Katsuhiro Otomo's animated feature *Akira* in 1988 marked anime's incorporation of a cyberpunk technological aesthetic. Animated film became a venue for the figuring of dark, dystopian postmodern views of the future demise and collapse of the industrial landscape of modernity in which we continue to live out our postmodern existences. Based on Otomo's original manga, the film *Akira* begins with a nuclear explosion that destroys Tokyo in 1988 and launches a third World War. The film then jumps forward to Neo-Tokyo in the year 2019, a city decimated by the blast, the war, and ongoing political violence but also displaying the advances of science and biotechnology as they segue in warped ways with the landscape of devastation (the character Tetsuo, who ultimately dies, develops paranormal abilities after serving as a government test subject, and his body acquires bizarre superhuman qualities). *Akira's* international cult success was due in part to its explicit reach to the adult audience that had embraced science fiction texts such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, a film that media scholar Scott Bukatman has recognized as one of the most significant examples of a film that embodies a postmodern ethos in its film style, set design, and narrative (while retaining aspects of modern style).¹¹ *Akira* stood apart from most other anime of the period in its use of lip-synched dialogue and fluid motion across numerous action scenes. The film spoke to a new kind of postmodern viewing subject—one who could readily identify with the jaded, apocalyptic view of a postmodern life lived in the ruins of modernity, and who could identify with the sense of resignation about the bleak future people faced as a result of the technological "progress" modernity had demonstrated with the bomb.



FIG. 8.3
Still from *Akira*, 1988

Both *Blade Runner* and *Akira*, though quintessentially postmodern films, seem to suggest, as we did earlier in this chapter, that we do not live in a fully postmodern world but in a world in which postmodernity is lived in the crumbling ruins of modernity. This is the postindustrial world of the late stages of industrialism in which the collapsing of time and compression of space have resulted in a kind of imploded destruction of the built environment and nature. Through these films, viewers engage with simulated environments with the jaded sense that we know what is to come and that our bodies may be physically malleable and changeable through technology and medicine. Those changes to our bodies may not be in our own hands. For example, in *Akira* the character Tetsuo's paranormal mental abilities were the result of experimentation on him by the government. These films are part of a dystopian postmodern worldview that was predominant in the 1980s and that continues in some fiction and media of the 2000s. This worldview emerged in many geographic settings simultaneously and in the aftermath of World War II, which was experienced in vastly different ways by different national subjects. Whereas in the United States *Akira* is a *Blade Runner*-like cyberpunk fiction about the demise of industrial capitalism, for Japanese audiences *Akira* makes obvious reference to the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the attempt to rebuild a culture from unthinkable devastation and in the face of international defeat and an ethically unconscionable act of violence against the history and citizenry of a nation. Animation and cartoons, in this postwar context, served a particular role in allowing a populace to be represented and to speak, even indirectly through media consumption and exchange, about an unthinkable violent trauma. The unnatural hair color and physical abilities of simulated and fantastic anime figures are expressive

means of moving away from the codes of realism in which disaster and tragedy are so typically encoded.

The new popular animated films that began in the mid-1990s with such Pixar productions as *Toy Story* (1995), one of the first fully CGI (computer graphics imagery) feature films, and *A Bug's Life* (1998) used techniques and styles of computer animation that, like their precedents in the globally distributed Japanese animated film, were aimed at adult audiences, as well as children. These Hollywood animations proved enormously successful financially, beginning a trend in U.S.-produced digital animated features that crossed the child-adult market. These films succeed financially in appealing to a broad range of viewers and producing a thriving DVD market, while as cultural texts they also deploy styles that speak to a new kind of viewing subject that is also quintessentially postmodern. They do this through a complex mix of conventional storytelling and layered ironic quotation referencing other cultural products.

Let's take as our example the film *Shrek* (2001), which was based on a children's book by the cartoonist William Steig and which has since become the first of a *Shrek* franchise. *Shrek* draws on the conventions of the traditional fairy tale, with the story of a princess who has been cursed and is waiting for her prince to rescue her, a fairy godmother, an annoying sidekick, fantastic fairyland kingdoms, and a feat that the hero must accomplish in order to win the princess. As a cultural text of postmodern style, *Shrek* is layered with references to earlier fairy tales, characters from other animated films, and Hollywood labor and industry practices. It is filled with reflexive jokes about representation. The film does this while also pursuing a conventional love story with a moral about loving oneself as one is instead of aspiring to look and

be like everyone else. The text operates on many levels simultaneously and addresses viewers who will understand the references (or at least will understand that multiple references to other texts are being made) and who are capable of reading the film's parodies of fairy tales while also engaging with the pleasure of seeing a conventional love story. Thus some viewers might read this scene, in which the princess fights off a band of robbers by using martial arts moves, as a reference to the technologically enhanced fight scenes in *The Matrix* (1999), which were themselves references to the style of Hong Kong martial arts films.

This is an example of intertextual meaning, in which the reference to *The Matrix* brings into *Shrek* meanings associated with another film. It is a joke in the film, of course, that

FIG. 8.4
Still from *Shrek*, 2001



the princess is trained in kung-fu fighting, and having her fight like Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix* pokes fun at the *Matrix* style and how it takes itself so seriously. Intertextuality, a term derived from literature, literally means the insertion of part of one text, with its meanings, into another. One of the fundamental aspects of intertextuality is its presumption that the viewer knows the text that is being referenced. Intertextuality is neither a new aspect of popular culture nor specific to postmodernism. After all, the use of celebrities in ads throughout the twentieth century to sell products can be seen as an intertextual tactic. The stars bring to the ad the meaning of their fame and the roles they have played. Well-known actors carry meanings from texts in which they have appeared with them into new texts. For example, we never see Adam Sandler solely as the characters he plays in a particular film; rather, we see him simultaneously as those characters he has played and as Adam Sandler, movie star and comedian, playing those characters. However, contemporary intertextuality operates on a level that is much more ironic and complex, addressing a media and visually savvy viewer who is familiar with image conventions and genres. A popular culture text such as *Shrek*, which derives its meaning in part from constant referencing to other popular culture products, is deploying many layers of intertextual meaning to tell its story and speak to and entertain viewers. Such a text addresses its viewers as savvy individuals jaded by contemporary popular culture, as audience members who have seen it all and who are used to being immersed in image culture.

These aspects of postmodern style point to the way in which postmodernism is, in some of its manifestations, about citation or quotation both in terms of referencing other texts and in terms of putting things in quotes to indicate a kind of distancing irony. Texts, rather than referring to real life, refer to other texts. The Italian semiotician Umberto Eco once wrote that in the age of postmodernism, a person can no longer say to someone, "I love you"; what they can say is, "as Barbara Cartland says in one of her romance novels, I love you."¹² As we noted before, postmodernism involves using mass and popular culture as a point of reference for our real-life activity. Such citation also points to another central aspect of postmodernism, which is the sense that older models of how to address audiences don't work anymore, and the sense among consumers that everything has been said and done before. We discuss parody and remake culture, which are results of this trend, later in this chapter. Here we focus on how this notion of there being nothing "new" anymore results in a kind of endless layering of citation. Postmodernism is distinguished from modernism in relation to the concept of the new. Modern thought, as well as modern art and literature, was very much about a sense of the new, the avant-garde, the radical new idea. In postmodernism, the sense that everything has been done before gives way to relentless quoting and remakes, a context in which the only way to get noticed is to be ironic, to quote—not only words but also clothing and appearance styles, whether we cite the past through wearing 1970s clothing or the latest fashions (which also cite the past).

Reflexivity and Postmodern Identity

The practice of making viewers aware of the means of production by incorporating them into the content of the cultural product was often a feature of modernism. In most modern work, this was a strategy used by artists as a form of political critique that asked viewers to notice the structure of the show in order to distance them from the surface pleasures of the text. This idea of distancing is an important one, because it means that viewers can be engaged at a critically conscious level. Bertolt Brecht, a well-known German Marxist playwright and critic of the 1920s and 1930s, proposed the concept of *distanciation* as a technique for getting viewers to extract themselves from the narrative in order to see the means through which the narrative of a cultural work (such as a play or movie) gets us to buy into a particular ideological viewpoint. Reflexivity, in which the text refers to its own means of production, undermines the illusion or fantasy aspects of the narrative, encouraging the viewer to be a critical thinker about the ideology conveyed by the narrative.

Postmodern popular culture and art take this modern concept of reflexivity further but with different effect. In many postmodern reflexive texts, much of the political critique of reflexivity has been tempered with humor or is simply not present in the text. Media producers offer us reflexive techniques of disillusionment not as tools for critical and distanced reflection on the real economic and cultural conditions behind the text but as forms of intellectual play. It is thus an irony of media history that the techniques and conventions of discontinuity, reflexivity, and narrative fragmentation that were tied to a political project of critique by socially conscious media producers have become the codes of advertisers and media producers who use these codes for intellectual play without offering viewers any significant critical or political message beneath the reflexive joke.

Self-awareness of one's inevitable immersion in everyday and popular culture has led some postmodern artists to produce works which reflexively examine their own position in relation to the artwork or the artwork's institutional context. The work of photographer Cindy Sherman is a good example of this approach. In the 1970s, Sherman began to make photographs in which she was her own model. She struck poses evoking actresses in film stills and photographed herself in sets designed to evoke popular cinema genres such as melodrama. These images do not reproduce particular film stills or stars. Rather, they evoke the style of a particular moment or genre, such as the Hollywood female star and studio publicity stills of the 1940s and 1950s.

Sherman's photographs can be seen as portraits that are neither about herself, as she is always disguised and playing a role, nor about some other real subject, film star, or character. Rather, they are ironic and deliberate imitations or simulations of a type.

FIG. 8.5
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled*, 1978



Sherman self-consciously appropriates the general styles, gestures, and stereotypes, performing them in conceptual interpretations. This series is a response to an era of feminist film criticism that challenged representations of women, the male gaze, and structures of identification that we discuss at length in chapter 3. Feminist film critics asked, How might women, as objects within the male gaze, identify within a position of active looking? Sherman's photography indirectly but powerfully engages these theories of looking and sexual difference by giving us visual texts that comment reflexively on women's place on both sides of the camera, as bearer of the look and as image. Indeed, many of Sherman's earliest photographs show her dressed in the garb of the height of the Hollywood studio era. The women she invokes are not the icons of her own generation but those of the studio-era films that appeared in syndication on television in the after-school hours during the decades in which Sherman grew up, the late 1960s and 1970s. Sherman's compositions reflexively pose questions for viewers about spectatorship, identification, the female body image, and the appropriation of the gaze by the woman photographer as her own subject. Sherman actively inserts herself into the media that she reflexively critiques, shifting the context from mainstream cinema to fine art. Rather than taking a critical stance from outside the image and its mode of production, Sherman inserts herself not only into the image but also into the process of its production, making the viewer aware that the woman in the image is also the woman behind the camera, both the bearer of the look and the object of the gaze. She enmeshes herself in the world being critically interrogated in her work. This is one of the key things that distinguishes Sherman's commentary as postmodern against the modernist critical-readings-from-above offered by feminist film criticism of roughly the same period: Sherman offers her critique reflexively through visual practice rather than deploying words to critique visual culture. In this, she participated in an important postmodern trend that still holds strong: Using visual cultural practice to engage in cultural critique about visual culture, rather than turning to words as if words were a more intelligent or more trustworthy form.

References to nostalgia for other historical periods is another hallmark of postmodern art captured in Sherman's photographs. Like much postmodern culture, Sherman's photographs feed our nostalgia for bygone eras at the same time that they offer reflexive critique of that engagement with nostalgia. Her double position as both producer of the scene and object of the gaze, however, introduces an edge of irony and reflexivity. Irony refers to a deliberate contradiction between the literal or dominant meaning of something and its intended meaning (which can be the opposite of the dominant meaning). Irony can be derived from contexts in which appearance and reality are in conflict. Sherman's photographs comment not only on the conditions of that past but also, ironically, on the artist-producer's awareness of her own pleasurable engagement in the visual culture of nostalgic fantasy that she evokes. By situating herself as both artist and subject, Sherman invites us to think reflexively about our own subjectivity and gendered processes of identification.

cultural memory, nostalgia, and fantasy in our engagement in postmodern visual culture. This makes her photographs ironic images that also instruct us in seeing practices of looking. Her work helps us to see looking as an activity that is historically determined, and as a practice in which we are actively situated rather than as an activity that we may stand outside of to critique from above.

Sherman's work points to the ways in which identity is perceived in postmodernism to be a much more flexible category than it was in modernism. As we have noted, concepts of identity in postmodernism understand the subject to be fragmented, pluralistic, and multifaceted. The constant questioning of postmodernism is integral to its rejection of modern concepts of the subject. The idea that we perform our identities, rather than the idea that they are fixed within us, is a key aspect of postmodernism.

We can see this by looking at the work of another artist who, like Sherman, uses photography to play off ideas of identity and performance. In her work called *Projects* (1997–2001), Nikki S. Lee combines performance art and ethnography (the study of cultures through empirical means). She not only observes but also adopts the styles of particular subcultures and identity groups (such as skateboarders, punks, drag queens, hip-hop musicians, Latinos, Korean school girls, seniors, tourists, exotic dancers, and yuppies). To infiltrate these groups, she changes her hair, style of dress, weight, and mannerisms. Her aim is not to fool people into believing she is an authentic member of these groups, but to experiment with the idea of forging new identities through cultural performance. Introducing herself to members of each group she infiltrates, she explains her artistic project and then gradually gains acceptance over the course of a few months. Once Lee is a part of the group, she has someone take snapshots of her in her new social environment, and these photographs then are put on display as part of her artwork. She also produced a film about this project (*A.K.A. Nikki S. Lee*, 2006).

Lee's engagement with the production of an identity she does not authentically own or occupy points to the postmodern idea that identity is produced through performance. On one hand, Lee is engaging in a process of imitation through disguise and performance, one that could be said to reduce identity into simple categories of signification that can be copied and reproduced without a lived relationship to their meanings. On the other hand, Lee's integration into these groups attests to her strong capacity to transform her being beyond appearances. Lee, who is Korean-American, states that her performative images are an extension of her own identity, which she defines as a constantly changing set of relationships. As art critic Russell Ferguson writes, "despite the seriousness of her preparation and the apparent success of her 'disguises,' Lee is on one level never playing a role at all."¹³

In Lee's work, as in Sherman's, the role of photography as a form of portraiture of a simulation is crucial. We can recall how portraiture was an essential early practice in photography to establish identity and individuality. Yet, in modern art movements, the image's function as a register of truth and meaning came under



FIG. 8.6
Nikki S. Lee, *The Hispanic Project* (25), 1998

scathing scrutiny. Postmodernism responds to modernism not by going beyond the material form of the image to some newer, more accurate register of truth but by embracing the surface and appearances as important aspects of meaning, not simply as something put on top of the real thing, the structure. The status of Sherman's images as self-portraits that perform identity make clear that the self is not an authentic subject to be accessed through introspection, and the image does not give the viewer access to the artist's deeper self. In Sherman's work, the portrait is all surface and artifice; in Lee's work it gives us access only to the performance of identity. This does not, however, mean that the artists are shallow or that they have no substance. Rather, in postmodernism, the surface is understood to be a crucially meaningful element of social life and not simply the illusion put over the real, like makeup hiding a blemish. We can no longer look below the surface for depth and true meaning, because we will find no hidden truth there but rather just a different way of seeing.

In this context, Lee's work questions notions of identity as innate, calling into question not only the stability and authenticity of identity and social groups but also the question of social integration. One of the things that is striking about her images is that they are quite convincing. In these casual snapshots, no one appears to be posing. They appear "authentic," signaling, perhaps, Lee's "success" at the performance of integration. Yet Lee also clearly stands apart in these images despite her ease within them. This is most obvious in the images that address issues of ethnic and racial identity—although she looks entirely comfortable in the "Hispanic Project" images, her Asian ethnic identity is also evident within them. Yet her performance also points to the performance of others in her images, the codes by which we can easily detect a particular subculture or social group.

The taking on and off of identity and identity's performative nature have been a feature of pop artists since the 1980s with the integration of musical performance with video. Thus, with the emergence of music videos when MTV was established in 1982, visual performance became more explicitly a part of the pop music industry. Madonna was an early icon of the music video form, and, as we

discussed in chapter 1, she popularized the strategies of appropriation and parody by adopting the look of the Madonna, and then adopting a Marilyn Monroe look, followed by numerous transformations of style and image over the course of her career. Madonna can be described as the quintessential postmodern pop figure of the 1980s and early 1990s in that she made the transformation of style a stylistic signature in itself. Also in the 1980s, pop singer Michael Jackson exhibited a similar penchant for bodily transformation as a means of nostalgic reference to past icons, undergoing a series of surgeries and treatments to change the look of his face and skin. These two vocal artists' construction of themselves as images, transforming their looks according to a familiar cultural referent, is emblematic of postmodern culture. Jackson's appearance eventually became completely different from his original look, as he used plastic surgery to erase any physical markers of black identity and whitened his skin to an extreme pallor.

These examples of changing and performing identity in pop icons points to broader issues of identity and the postmodern body. In postmodernism, the body is imagined to be easily transformed: One can change one's gender through cross-dressing or surgery, one can change one's race through changing skin tone and using colored lenses, and one can change one's appearance and shape through gym workouts, liposuction, plastic surgery, prosthetics, or changing one's hormonal makeup. In many ways, these concepts of the body are in sharp contrast to the image of the body in modernity, in which the body was perceived to be bounded, stable, and fixed (one lived one's life with the body and its attendant identities—gender, race, sexuality—with which one was born). Concepts of the body in postmodernism are thus fully integrated with contemporary concepts about the integration of technologies into bodies, creating cyborg bodies that are part machine and part human, the metaphors of the interchange and malleability that are a part of digital culture, and the concepts of the body as a genetic map of DNA that have emerged over the past twenty years with the rise of genetic science. The postmodern body is also a body perceived through information science, and this has consequences for how the relationship of the body and identity is conceived. Fragmentation, malleability, fluidity, and the possibility of "reprogramming" the body (an obvious computer metaphor) become the dominant metaphors for conceiving the body in this context.

The fluid postmodern body is potentially one of shape-shifting, a body that can be resculpted into new shapes and forms. This concept has been explored by the French performance artist Orlan in relation to the iconic images of art. Orlan underwent a series of cosmetic surgeries performed with plastic surgeons in art galleries with an audience present. In these works, aspects of her face were combined with facial features taken from paintings, such as those of the fifth-century painting *Zeuxis*, to create not simply a new model but a kind of hybrid antimodel that short-circuits ideals and norms such as beauty and the natural. Body and identity become infinitely malleable in a culture in which the image is the ultimate register

of experience. Orlan's work suggests that there is no "real," original body to which we might return in our quest to model ourselves after some fantasy of what we hope to become: the image of an image. Her performances cast the physical body not just as the screen on which meaning is simply inscribed to be erased and redrawn (as we might do with makeup) but as the structurally malleable and changeable material through which models are brought to life in the real. Once again we see the precession of the simulacra enacted in a postmodern practice of appropriation and pastiche, but in this instance we see the degree to which material transformation entails risk, violence, and loss. Although plastic cosmetic surgery has become an everyday consideration for many members of middle- and upper-class Western cultures, the loss of identity and the pointed embrace of the bizarre and the ugly in the service of aesthetics that Orlan performs takes this to the extreme. In doing so, she highlights the degree to which we have taken choice and self-fashioning to a limit that has surpassed notions of self-unity and the rootedness of the human subject in the natural and the biological body that grounded the Enlightenment subject.

The idea of the authenticity of the appearance of the face is pursued by media theorist Lisa Nakamura in her examination of *allooksame.com*, a website designed by Dyske Suematsu that is devoted to the interrogation of the idea that one can "read" racial identity from the face. The person accessing the site is offered eighteen pictures of faces that are identified as either Japanese, Korean, or Chinese. The player is asked to guess the correct national identity of the face based on his or her knowledge about the typical appearance of members of these groups. The site then calculates the score of the player, which is on average a seven, whether or not the player is an "insider" or "outsider" in one of the cultural groups represented, showing that racial classification is more easily gotten wrong than right. Suematsu began the site as a joke, but with the rise of racial profiling in the 2000s it takes on a cultural role as an instructive lesson in the conceptual and political limits and problems of racial classification. As Nakamura points out, the "truth" about race is not a visual truth. Identity is always complex and diverse, and visual signifiers, as we saw earlier in this book, are always open to different meanings. Eye shape, hair color, and other physical qualities of appearance are no different in this respect. The site



FIG. 8.7
Orlan, *7th Operation*, 1993

makes players interrogate the cultural and political bases on which racial taxonomies are imagined and built. Nakamura, through her examination of player responses to this site, interrogates the racial visual essentialism and reductionism built into racial profiling and extended in what Nakamura describes as the “ethnic absolutist identity politics” of those who uphold authentic and purist or essentialized notions about racial identity.¹⁴

Pastiche, Parody, and the Remake

As we have noted, postmodernism has been characterized by a kind of fatigue with the new and the sense that everything has been done before. Postmodernism asks: Can there ever be new ideas and images, things that have not been thought of or done before? Does it matter? The world of images today consists of a huge variety of remakes, copies, parodies, replicas, reproductions, and remixes. In the arenas of art and architecture, as well as popular culture, the idea of an original image or form seems to have been thoroughly subverted.

One of the key terms used to describe this culture of imitation, remake, and parody is *pastiche*. Film theorist Richard Dyer has written that the primary way to understand pastiche is as an imitation that announces itself as such and that involves combining elements from other sources.¹⁵ The term *pastiche* is derived from the Italian word *pasticcio*, which refers to a combination of elements that evokes, according to Dyer, assemblage, collage, montage, *capriccio* (a style of composing that combines elements from different places), medley forms, and hip-hop forms of sampling, scratching, and riffing. Dyer thus points to the fact that pastiche has a long history in image making. Within the realm of imitation and quoting that constitutes pastiche, we can find different kinds of combinations and relationships to the original texts—from ironic quoting to parody to remakes to mashups. Pastiche has a very particular relationship to history. As a strategy it can often involve pilfering from history and combining historical elements in ways that have little historical meaning but are rather a kind of play.

One of the key strategies of pastiche is a questioning of the status of the original. As we discussed in chapter 5, use of this technique can raise legal questions because determining the legal ownership of the fragments of work appropriated as elements in a pastiche can be a complex matter. Artist Sherrie Levine made a series of works in the 1980s that are emblematic of this kind of postmodernism pilfering and borrowing that questions ownership and the original. Levine simply rephotographed famous images—in blatant violation of their copyright, the signifier of authorship and authenticity—and displayed them as her own. In *After Edward Weston (#2)*, Levine rephotographed Weston’s famous image of his son, Neil, entitled *Torso of Neil* (1925). Weston’s image is situated in a long history of male nudes, which Levine’s “theft” disrupts precisely because it is explicitly presented as copied, rather than concealing its status as a copy. However, her choice of this male nude is

provocative, given that Weston was known for his depictions of the female nude. Levine’s work is a defiant critique of the idea of an original and a feminist critique of the idea of the male artist as master. It presents the viewer with a questioning of the differing value of images and the entire question of reproduction. In addition, like new technologies that allow images to be easily “reauthored,” Levine’s aesthetic style questions the very foundations of authorship. One of the principles put in question in Levine’s work is the idea of the original. Levine’s photographic appropriations, like the photographs of Cindy Sherman, raise questions about the role of the artist as the sole creator of a unique work. Who is the “real” artist here, Levine or Weston, and which is the “real” work of art, the copy or the original? Do we care about the “real” or the “true” in the era of reproducibility? This work questions the idea of originality in art and the value of the aura that is placed on it in museums, galleries, and the art market. In works such as these, the question of the referent (the real object to which a work refers) becomes quite complicated. These images are reworkings of representations, which are part of a potentially endless reworking of images for which the original referent is no longer identifiable.

When pastiche is engaged in reworking elements of the past, it can also fall into the category of parody. For instance, throughout most of the period of classical Hollywood film, many films were created to fit specifically into genres, such as the Western, the gangster film, the romantic comedy, or the action picture. One of the essential aspects of genre theory is that specific genres (in film, television, literature, etc.) establish certain conventions and formulas that are recognizable to viewers, whose pleasure derives in part from a combination of seeing familiar elements and seeing the variation in them from one film to the next. Although genres still thrive in the context of popular culture, with new genres being created in television all the time, we are now in an era in which the vast majority of genre works are genre parodies. Importantly, these texts work at two levels at once, participating in the codes of a genre at the same time that they are self-consciously parodying those codes. So, for instance, a horror film such as *Scream* (1996) is a parody of the genre of horror films that knowingly taps into viewer’s knowledge of the genre’s conventions and formulas. Directed by well-known horror film director Wes Craven, the film repeatedly refers to the conventions of horror films in



FIG. 8.8

Sherrie Levine, *After Edward Weston (#2)*, 1980, © S. Levine. Courtesy of the artist and the Paula Cooper Gallery

FIG. 8.9
Psycho, 1960, with *The Simpsons*
 remake



which characters are always killed after they have sex or are attacked after they say “who’s there?” In addition the film is peppered with dialogue about the movies (“You’ve seen one too many movies”; “Life is like a movie, only you can’t pick your genre”). Yet it is also a film that is as scary to watch as any horror film. After the making of *Scream*, most films within the genre of horror film continued this tactic of addressing viewers who were genre-savvy, with such films as *Scary Movie* (2000) taking the genre parody to camp levels.

A television show such as *The Simpsons*, which often remakes old films in its story lines, uses parody to play off the codes of film and cultural history. The series has over the years produced a huge number of parodies of well-known films.¹⁶ When the show remade the famous shower scene from the 1960 Alfred Hitchcock film *Psycho*, it did so by incorporating particular plot elements of the film into its existing locale and characters. With many humorous and absurd plot lines, the episode did not ask viewers to take its reworking of *Psycho* seriously, merely to share in its homage to aspects of the film, such as the close-up of Janet Leigh’s eye as she lies dead in the bathroom (remade as Homer’s eye as he lies on the floor). The meaning of the show, and its humor, are dependent on viewers engaging with the differences between the show’s parody and the texts it is pilfering. As we stated earlier, this does not constitute the kind of strategy deployed by modernists, who used reflexivity to make viewers stand back in critical distance, but rather suggests a deliberately playful engagement that allows us to enjoy our involvement in both the old text and its parodic remake. We used the word *play* to characterize the kind of parody that we see in *The Simpsons* because pastiche of the past rarely intends to make a statement about the status of the historical text it references. Rather, the remake uses the old text to create a layered

intertext between the two works, summoning in viewers the depth of feelings that extend across both texts and the time periods between them.

The remake has also been a subject for artists. The artist Jeff Wall layers his works with references to philosophical ideas of writers such as Walter Benjamin and to canonical works of art, such as Rodin’s *The Thinker* or Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur L’Herbe*. Many of his works are direct pastiche remakes of famous works of art, displayed as large backlit transparencies. In *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993), Wall remakes a famous 1831–33 print by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, which depicts peasants responding to a gust of wind with Mount Fuji in the background. The original Hokusai print is a woodcut, with an abstract printmaking texture, made by an artist who also produced a famous image of a cresting wave in woodcut style. The Hokusai image here is part of a series of works of different views of Mount Fuji and an early representation of movement. In this Hokusai image, the gestures of the figures indicate movement captured in an instant as a figure whose sight is obstructed by a blowing scarf lets go of papers that fly through the air. In its representation of an instant, the Hokusai print anticipates the instantaneity of photographic imaging (it was made just a few years before photography emerged in Europe). In contrast, the Wall photograph derives its meaning from its status as a photographic remake of an older form, a woodcut. Wall stages his images to make them look spontaneous. A similarly posed group of

FIG. 8.10
 Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind*
 (after Hokusai), 1993





FIG. 8.11
Katsushika Hokusai, *A High Wind on Yeijiri*, from *Thirty-six views of the Fuji*, c. 1831–33

figures respond to the papers flying up in the gust of wind, against the backdrop not of Mount Fuji but of a drab industrial landscape. When exhibited, the image creates the effect, as many of Wall's works do, of an elaborate canvas, at once photographic, cinematic (with its evocation of movement and its backlit effect), and painterly. It is not incidental that Wall's image was created using digital imaging tools that allowed the artist to seamlessly combine elements from more than a hundred shots.¹⁷

Postmodernism is often accused of ignoring history, of pilfering past image and appearance for clever play. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon writes, history is a key point of inquiry for postmodernism. Postmodern questioning raises important epistemological questions about the project of history and the degree to which we have access to the past. Hutcheon writes that postmodernism "suggests no search for transcendent, timeless meaning but rather a re-evaluation of, and a dialogue with the past in light of the present."¹⁸ In postmodernism, there is an acknowledgement that we can only know the past through the fragments of its remnants. The French artist Christian Boltanski engages deeply with questions of memory, history, and the image, in particular of the event that shadowed twentieth-century world history: the Holocaust. In many of his works, Boltanski takes the signifiers of the Holocaust (photographs of Holocaust victims, archival boxes, discarded clothing and shoes) and replicates them as a means of reflecting on how the Holocaust hovers over European-American culture. Boltanski has created works called inventories that evoke archives, with piles of boxes that may or may not contain records or objects, and has created installations of piles of clothing in which visitors are obligated to walk across the clothing that evokes the emptying out of bodies. He thus references the effect of the Holocaust while refusing its codes of representation. He has stated,

in trickster fashion, "My work is not about XXXXXXXX it is after XXXXXXXX."¹⁹

The role of the photograph as an icon of memory and history is a key feature of Boltanski's work, in which he signals "the complex suspicion that surrounds photography's documentary claims in a postmodern and post-Holocaust world," according to Marianne Hirsch, who also states that Boltanski's work is "devoted to uncoupling any uncomplicated connection between photograph and 'truth.'"²⁰ Boltanski has produced many works that rework images from the past, though never solely to excavate history. Rather, he engages in a form of postmodern pastiche with photographs as unknowable artifacts that are easily dislodged from their historical referents. In some of his works, such as this version of *Reserves* (1989), he took images of Jewish schoolchildren from the 1930s, rephotographed them, and then placed them behind lights. The faces of the students have become a blur, each a haunting image with dark eye sockets, lit by the harsh light of a desk lamp that evokes both interrogation and the glare of historical analysis. Nothing is known about the fate of these children whose faces are scrutinized up close by the camera. This work is thus not, like most art about the past, about retrieving the identities of these children; rather, it invokes the imminence of their death at the time of the photograph's taking. The clothes stacked beneath evoke the possessions left behind by Holocaust victims, the empty clothing that signals absence.

Ultimately, Boltanski's work engages with the question of the individual and memory in ways that make us think about how we know the past. Richard Dyer writes that pastiche, like the concept of the death of the author that we discuss in chapter 2, critiques the concept of the modern subject as the center and author of discourse. "Accepting that [we] are in the realm of the already said may be a source of anguish," Dyer states, if we are invested in ideas of the originating position of knowledge and authority. Pastiche articulates affective content, he states, through imitation:

It imitates formal means that are themselves ways of evoking, moulding and eliciting feeling, and thus in the process is able to mobilize feelings even while signalling that it is doing so. Thereby it can, at its best, allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on. That is to say, it can enable us to know ourselves affectively as historical beings.²¹

Through pastiche and these kinds of postmodern engagements with history, we can see how seeing the past remains within the present.

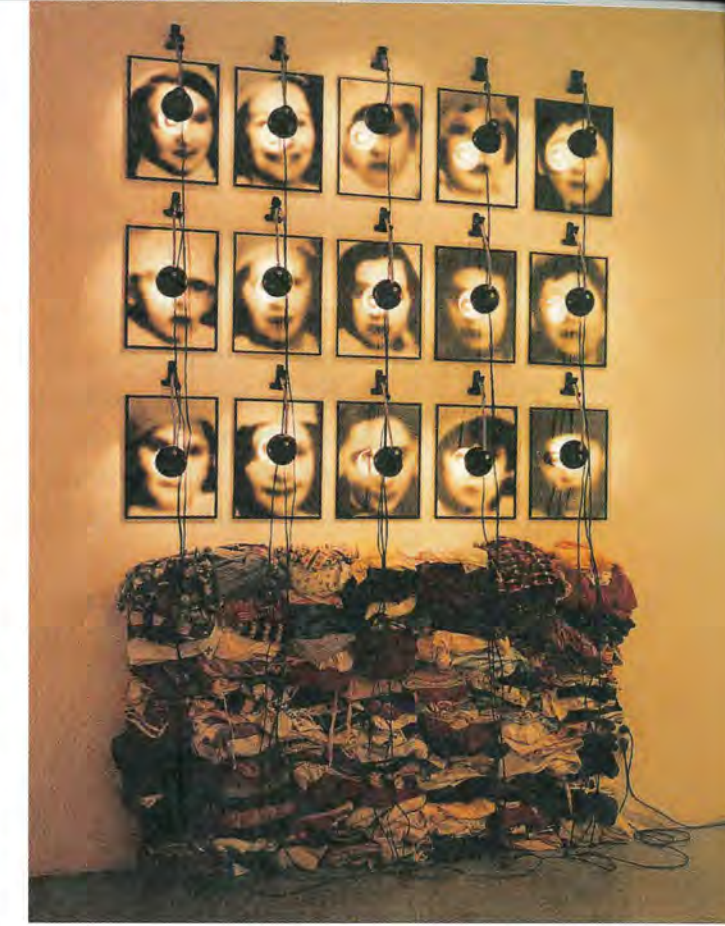


FIG. 8.12
Christian Boltanski, *Reserves: The Purim Holiday*, 1989

Indie Media and Postmodern Approaches to the Market

Postmodern style and forms of address are derived not simply from changes that have taken place in popular culture and the art world. Postmodern culture is also produced through changes that have taken place in the production, dissemination, and marketing of media forms. The emergences of independent media forms and productions have capitalized in particular on the Web as an alternative venue for marketing media apart from the confines of the industry. Postmodern styles have emerged not only out of a set of economic and cultural shifts but also through a redefinition of authorship and the relationship of production, distribution, and consumption that has been enabled by changing technologies and new cultural practices.

Indie films give us an example of a new postmodern kind of market for media. Indie films are those movies produced outside the Hollywood studio system, a national studio system with a solid economic base, or an economically stable and thriving sector of a nation's privatized industry (such as Bollywood). Whereas at the beginning of the independent film movement producers saw themselves as standing apart from and against the mainstream film industry, by the mid-1980s indie filmmakers began to use stylistic strategies associated with postmodernism, such as reflexive narrative form, the remake, and parody, and business and marketing strategies that both drew on and reworked industry standards and practices to make and promote their films. It is actually the case that the Hollywood industry itself grew out of oppositionality. Hollywood was the place to which filmmakers fled to escape the control of the Motion Picture Patents Company that dominated and controlled film production on the east coast of the United States in the early decades of the cinema. Those producers who moved to California to set up studios had escaped the control of the existing studio monopoly. When the Hollywood studios gained control of the industry in the 1930s and 1940s, monopolies made it difficult for producers not associated with the major studios to get their films shown in the popular chain movie theaters whose bookings were controlled by studio interests.

The independents were the smaller film companies such as that of the African American director Oscar Micheaux, whose company produced films that were shown in cinema houses in urban centers such as Chicago that catered to black clientele in the era of segregation. With the loosening of control over distribution and exhibition that came after the Hollywood Antitrust Case of 1948 and the subsequent demise of the Hollywood Production Code that required industry board approval of content and imagery in all distributed releases, U.S. film culture became more diversified in the range of films shown, with independent art houses exhibiting foreign, art, and independent films that continued to fail to get bookings at the major chains. The postwar availability of lightweight 16mm cameras made possible a kind of independence in film production through lower-cost supplies and equipment that was less unwieldy and expensive. Independent film came to be associated both with the

art house film (associated with highbrow tastes and European or Scandinavian film cultures) and with a modernist avant-garde approach to film in aesthetic and political movements around the world. In national contexts including England, the United States, France, Germany, and Japan, filmmakers opposed the dominant national styles, themes, and structure of mainstream cinema by producing films that offered new styles, themes, and structures. Critique of the corporate means of production took many forms in the 1960s and 1970s, ranging from this kind of extreme formalism to the fragmented narratives, allegorical stories, and reflexively political films of the French New Wave.

In the 1980s, independence took on a new and more postmodern meaning as filmmakers began to critique Hollywood style through strategies such as reflexive narratives and appropriations of genres and styles from earlier periods of cinema. When a few independent filmmakers, including Jim Jarmusch (*Stranger than Paradise*, 1984) and Spike Lee (*She's Gotta Have It*, 1986), broke precedent by achieving box office success with low-budget independent features, industry investors linked to or operating outside the big six studios made possible a degree of financial stability and even success that allowed these directors to rise to a degree of national name recognition. While experimental filmmakers remained on the margins, financing their films themselves, these postmodern directors worked the margins between the counterculture and the mainstream, playing the fine line between countercultural figure and cultural critic while deploying the postmodern strategy of working from within the popular even as one appropriates, parodies, and critiques it. Indie filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s embraced the contradiction of working through popular form and mainstream business strategies, even while remaining outside the centers of power (the big studios).

In the decades of the 1980s and 1990s the economic structures of popular culture were changing, as we saw in the case of the television industry's expansion to cable, to embrace a broader array of tastes and to offer a wider range of consumer choices. The rise of directors such as the Coen brothers, Quentin Tarantino, and Michel Gondry in the 1990s is part of a trend toward the market's strategic support of a diverse range of products and styles, rather than opting to subsidize only the products and performers that achieve wide mass-audience success. A cynical view of this trend would note that marginal subcultures no longer have the ability to survive unless an investor snaps them up to make money. This case is well illustrated in the example of popular music. One can find a CD of an indie band signed to a middle-sized label in Target stores; that band might achieve a high ranking on iTunes charts for sales; yet that same band might not have name recognition among even a fraction of a typical college class. We can be cynical about the wiliness of investors who have learned to capitalize on the niche audiences of countercultures, marketing music, films, and even clothing for smallish market segments with the idea that small market incomes will add up in a diverse world of consumers hoping to define themselves as unique through their styles.

The fragmentation of the market, however, has supported the growth of a significant independent sector in the 2000s. With iTunes and other means of Web marketing, bands can bypass the restrictive terms of record labels and contracts as they accrue a fan base. In 2007, the British alternative rock band Radiohead broke protocol by making its seventh album, *In Rainbows*, available on its initial release as a digital download for whatever price one chose to pay on the band's website. When the album was released for retail sales, it rose quickly to number one on the United World Chart, Billboard, and the UK Album Chart, ranking, according to many reviews, as one of the best releases of the year. Radiohead was making a statement in their strategy of releasing their music for optional cost to fans about the restrictions on the Web as media and music corporations struggle to maintain ownership rights to—and profits from—media and music that is infinitely copyable. Their strategy was not the modernist one of working against the industry by acting wholly apart from its systems and practices. Rather, their tactic was to work within an accepted system of advertisement and distribution, going with the Web dictum that “information (or, in this case, music) wants to be free” while also challenging the increasing privatization of the Web and its flagrant use as an instrument of the global market. The payment that constitutes ownership of the copy became the object of a very public statement about the restrictions on ownership maintained by record companies that keep independent artists from exercising artistic freedom. As companies dictate not only the marketing practices of bands but also the look and sound of bands as elements of style that contribute to mass audience appeal, styles are reduced to the tastes suggested to be the most marketable by audience surveys and industry market analysts. The postmodern musical artist, in the case of Radiohead, acts as independent producer, making decisions not only about style but also about publicity and release strategies that are typically controlled by record companies and producers. Creativity is thus exercised not only in the music per se but also in the means of making that music public. Radiohead's strategy in marketing was postmodern in the sense that they did not simply resist the mainstream and work outside the industry. They worked within the framework of the industry to find a new route through which to achieve publicity and to reach a broad fan base.

As we see in the case of bands such as The White Stripes, who build their careers steadily on the basis of personal choices about forms of expression, style, and ways of performing and marketing, economic success in the context of postmodernism can be built through the cultivation of niche audiences and narrowcast marketing. The revivals of the careers of punk performers such as Patti Smith and the Smiths (whose member Morrissey is a popular indie solo artist in the 2000s), who in the 1970s and 1980s embraced left politics and insistence on a right to a personal style, is indicative of a trend toward the independent as someone who is not exactly an outlier or opponent of mass culture. These independents may coexist with performers who collectively represent a multiplicity of politics and styles, no one of which can be pointed to as representing a dominant worldview or mass style. For some of those

who continue to believe in the role of media as a tool of social change, this incorporation of those independents at the margins into a differentiated and wide-ranging middle ground dulls the political edge of the independent, reducing marginality and oppositionality to just another style. Postmodernism, then, as a politics that relies on style for its expression, runs the risk not only of reducing real social conditions to mere media effects but also of reducing political expression to image. Whether the independents of the 2000s can effect social change in meaningful ways remains for readers to see . . . in real life.

Postmodern Space, Geography, and the Built Environment

Just as we can say that the experience of modernity changes concepts of space and time, with the rise of urbanization and communication technologies creating a separation of time and space and a distinction between space and place, postmodern space also creates new kinds of experiences.²² Modern space began a separation of time and space (through the railroad and other modern technologies) that would continue to increase in the context of postmodernism and the rise of digital technologies, virtual experiences, and the rise of wireless technologies. Concepts of postmodern space have tended to focus on simulation and the emergence of non-places. Simulations, on the one hand, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, have been a dominant theme in postmodernism, and the rise of such online worlds as Second Life is an indicator of the ease with which contemporary interactions that take place entirely online and in simulated spaces have become normalized in particular social contexts. An online world such as Second Life has 3D animation through which users create virtual people and identities (visualized through avatars), virtual societies, economies, cities, buildings, and legal systems. The enormous popularity of Second Life, which has more than one and a half million users all around the world, testifies to the pleasures involved in participating in online communities. Second Life has been a site at which architects and artists produce work for online viewers and audiences, at which universities hold classes, and at which much real-world activity finds an online 3D counterpart. Many activities take place in Second Life, including, as fig. 8.13 shows, political activities such as antiwar protests. Much can be said about how such online games and worlds encourage particular kinds of fantasy lives and imaginary activities. Here we note that, however crudely rendered despite their 3D aspect, the visual elements of these online worlds are crucial to their popularity and their fantasy elements. Thus architects can design buildings in Second Life that avatars can “teleport” to as a means to experiment with design. Importantly, the interrelationship of online activities and “offline” or real-world activities in a “world” such as Second Life is highly continuous in these contexts; this defies in many ways the early formations of Baudrillard and others about how simulations cancel out and take the place of the real.



FIG. 8.13
Antiwar protest on Second Life,
December 1, 2007

The concept of the “nonplace” is, on the other hand, a kind of physical space that demands less presence of people within it. Space has often been defined in the context of postmodernism as sites of distraction and waiting—the freeway, the airport, the Internet café—spaces that are defined by being en route to somewhere else, or spaces in which people are connected virtually to other spaces rather than being “present” in actual space. Marc Augé refers to these as nonplaces, sites in which we are solitary, disconnected, and distracted, sites that are defined in a certain sense by the lack of presence they demand from those within them. As we noted in chapter 4, virtual space defies the laws of Cartesian space in that it is not mappable or graspable; it thus demands new models for thinking about how we are situated in space.

Questions of how the built environment has changed in relationship to the shifts of space, time, and concepts of identity of postmodernism can be seen as crucial to the practices of postmodern architecture. On the one hand, postmodern architecture raises questions about how to think about space, history, and context; on the other hand, it reveals many aspects of the postmodern engagement with mass culture, popular culture, and kitsch. With the publication of the book *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972, the architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour insisted that architects must be more attentive to the tastes and styles characterizing the spaces that are truly enjoyed by the masses in their everyday lives. They turned their attention to the built environment of the kitschy hotels and fast-food joints of the Las Vegas strip. They broke with the style of architects including Le Corbusier, whose book *The Decorative Arts of Today* was a critique of ornamentation and craft in the interiors of everyday spaces. Architects at mid-century embraced an aesthetic that emphasized clean, stripped-down design, modularity, clarity, repetition, and flowing lines. Buildings in urban spaces were designed without ornamentation and their rooms outfitted with identical window coverings to give a uniform look to their exteriors, all to reduce the design to the



FIG. 8.14
The Las Vegas strip

beauty of form. This style was the epitome of modernism in its embrace of a philosophy that saw truth in material form and universal beauty in the basic elements of design and that saw crass and cheap consumerism reflected in purely decorative detailing and symbolism for the sake of symbolism, apart from functionality.

Venturi’s firm reacted against the functionalism and minimalism of these mid-century architecture firms whose built environments, they felt, were wrongly ignoring the pleasures and tastes of the everyday person and the importance of design for design’s sake to the ability of human subjects to feel comfortable and at home in their spaces of work, home, and leisure. They turned the tables on what they saw as a modernist contempt for the everyday person and his or her pedestrian tastes. The everyday, in the form of sculptures of chickens, larger-than-life donuts and other visual jokes adorning fast-food joints and the tacky flourish and flashing lights of cheap motels, was represented in *Learning from Las Vegas*, which helped architects and a broader readership notice the importance of the visual culture of mass consumption that had grown up in the years since World War II. Appropriation, pastiche, and bricolage were everywhere apparent in the design of the Vegas Strip, not as intentional expressions of a culture of critique but as means through which the postmodern subject communicated and interacted with and through its built environment. The tacky, the trashy, and the crass were embraced as an iconography and design form of the masses, who did not ignorantly embrace these approaches but

le Corbusier's
modernist arch.
vs
Venturi's
postmodernist arch.
re: ornamentation,
kitsch, pop

who saw humor and took pleasure in the tongue-in-cheek display of “bad” taste and cheesy glitz. *Learning from Las Vegas* became a postmodern primer for theorists of modernism who, through this book, came to understand that the ideal of universal design, with its insistence on functionality and its rejection of decoration, metaphor, and symbolism, ignored the important ways that these elements functioned as cultural signifiers of the masses spontaneously forging a world of expression from the ground up, out of the consumer spaces of postwar culture.

This critique of the failures of modern architecture is a key aspect of postmodern architecture. Architecture critic Charles Jencks writes that postmodern architecture emerged when modern architecture died, with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972. The Pruitt-Igoe complex had been constructed according to the progressive ideals of modern architecture when it was built in 1951, with a style influenced by Le Corbusier’s concepts of urbanism; yet it had failed as a structure for public housing, becoming a site of crime, vandalism, and decay.²³ Jencks and others see the double coding of postmodernism as a means for it to communicate to residents and workers in ways that these modern buildings failed to do. Thus postmodern architecture can stress contextualization (buildings that speak to the architectural environments in which they are situated) and the capacity to speak on several levels at once, signaling simultaneously references to high architecture and mass culture.

As a key strategy of postmodern architecture, pastiche relates to this strategy of contextualization. Many architectural designs of postmodern style deploy a kind of plagiarizing, quoting, and borrowing of previous and current styles, through which the very notions of architectural lineage and authenticity are radically called into question. For example, Philip Johnson’s well-known design for the AT&T building (now the Sony building) in New York is a modern tower topped with a sculpted pediment, often referred to as a Chippendale motif. The building creates an unusual profile in the New York skyline and, in a certain sense, the reference to Chippendale style, or to furniture, makes the building, which has a similar high archway entrance, seem like a kind of wardrobe piece, as if it is simultaneously being ornate and making fun of ornamentation. The building’s playful engagement with ornamentation is also a reaction against the functionalism of modern architecture. Importantly, this kind of architectural pastiche of mixing different historical styles makes no statement about history and has no sense of rules about what is “right” for design but rather is a playful quoting, borrowing, pilfering, and combining of different design styles, genres, and forms. Pastiche works in defiance of the concept of progress—the idea, for instance, that styles get better as they evolve. The notion of progress so fundamental to modernist design and architecture is thus implicitly critiqued by postmodernism’s studied disregard for the new. In modernism, style follows a linear course, each new style building on and progressing forward from the last by introducing more functionality or a better design. In postmodernism, styles can be mixed with no sense that we are moving toward something better.



FIG. 8.15
Philip Johnson, AT&T building,
now the Sony building, New York

In addition, many elements of postmodern buildings explicitly defy the notion of architecture as functional. An arch may have no structural function, and its use may reside in the humor of existing without a function, as mere decoration. A passage may lead nowhere, a facade may conceal nothing, and a Greek column might stand next to a Gothic arch. This is all done toward a playful undermining of some basic architectural principles and a celebration of surface that works simultaneously as a joke about architecture’s functional role. Pastiche allows elements of architectural form to act as free-floating signifiers, detached from their original historical or functional context, which can constantly change meaning from different angles and in different contexts. In keeping with the respect for low and consumer culture epitomized in *Learning from Las Vegas*, many of the most famous architectural designs of the postmodern period have been spaces of public consumption, such as shopping malls.

Playing with the functionality of buildings is also a key aspect of postmodernism design. Thus a building such as the Centre Georges Pompidou in the Beaubourg



FIG. 8.16
Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers,
Centre Georges Pompidou
building

section of Paris (for this reason, the building is commonly known as Beaubourg), which was designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers and which houses the Musée d'Art Moderne Nationale and other cultural institutions, has a design that turns the building inside out, with the functions of the building, such as air ducts and air conditioning, plumbing, and elevators color coded and placed on the exterior in the "exoskeleton" of the building. Rather than masking the functions of the building on its interior, the building displays these functional systems as its ornamentation, on its skin. Here we could say that the building is playing with the elements of building function, making them look like colorful elements at play in the surrounding environment.

Postmodern architecture has also redirected attention toward a more pluralistic set of structures for habitation, rejecting the preoccupation with corporate structures and high-art cultural institutions that were embraced in modern architecture. The architecture of sheds and shantytowns are forms engaged with by the contemporary architect Teddy Cruz, whose designs and writings are situated across transnational contexts such as the border cities of San Diego and Tijuana. In contrast to the modernists and many of the postmodern architects who worked primarily in the design of large-scale structures built for those corporations or individuals at the wealthiest end of the economic spectrum, Cruz emphasizes the importance of the built spaces of those at the lowest end of the economic spectrum—the border settlements and shantytowns of migrant workers, for example, or the cardboard structures of people who are homeless and living in the margins of urban spaces, under roadway bridges and in the urban canyons of public parks. Cruz considers the logics of postmodernity—its production of global subjects in the form of migrant



FIG. 8.17
Teddy Cruz design for housing
in Tijuana

workers, undocumented immigrants, and homeless families who craft a new kind of nomadic living out of the everyday materials at hand, such as the castoffs of urban construction sites and the packaging left over from purchases in the consumer and business sectors.

One of the primary issues that hovers over the concepts of postmodernism is the degree to which they are a response to the fading and shifting aspects of modernism and the degree to which they signal a new era of some kind, a new episteme, a new way of thinking and being, a new way of making art, popular culture, and buildings, a new way of writing fiction, and so on. The self-consciousness of postmodernism is potentially itself a phenomenon that will fold in on itself until its viability seems limited. As we noted in the beginning of this chapter, we do not live in a world of postmodernism but rather in a world in which the tensions of modernity and postmodernity are active and present, a world that has many populations living in what can only be called premodern life situations of poverty and subsistence. How those worlds are entering into modern and postmodern domains can be dramatically different from the traditional trajectory of European-American societies. For instance, when locations of subsistence living acquire cell phone technology before they have a basic industrial economy, how does that change these contexts? These examples from postmodern architecture allow us to see postmodernism within a global frame that opens it up to political possibilities. Whereas Venturi's firm, in *Learning from Las Vegas*, emphasized the importance of seeing and respecting the visual culture of the commercial architecture of mass consumption, Cruz emphasizes the importance of seeing and noticing the visual and material culture of the bricoleurs, the appropriators, and the pastiche workers who use these postmodern approaches not simply to forge a new style but to live in the margins of a world economy. Global capitalism produces subjects who exist farther from the centers of economic wealth and technological advancement than ever before due to globalization's production of an ever wider economic divide yet who are nevertheless global, and it is their appropriative fashioning of the materials at hand to make do and find a place that shows us the tensions of the modern, the postmodern, the postindustrial, and the global at once.

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, 2 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981).
2. Valerie Jaffee, "An Interview with Jia Zhang-ke," *Senses of Cinema* (June 2004), www.sensesofcinema.com (accessed March 2008).
3. Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, trans. Paul Patton and Paul Foss, 29 (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1988).
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